

Members

Rep. Markt Lytle, Chair
Rep. Robert Cherry
Rep. John Frenz
Rep. William Friend
Rep. Scott Mellinger
Rep. Jeff Thompson
Sen. Robert Jackman, Vice-Chair
Sen. Sue Landske
Sen. Connie Lawson
Sen. James Lewis
Sen. Katie Wolf
Sen. Richard Young



INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE ON RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL ISSUES

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MEETING MINUTES¹

Meeting Date: September 6, 2000
Meeting Time: 10:00 A.M.
Meeting Place: Jennings County Public Library, 2375 N.
State Highway 3, Rms 2 & 3
Meeting City: North Vernon, Indiana
Meeting Number: 2

Members Present: Rep. Markt Lytle, Chair; Rep. John Frenz; Rep. Scott Mellinger; Rep. Robert Cherry; Rep. William Friend; Rep. Jeff Thompson; Sen. Robert Jackman, Vice-Chair; Sen. Connie Lawson; Sen. Richard Young; Sen. Katie Wolf; Sen. James Lewis.

Members Absent: Sen. Sue Landske.

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at approximately 10:00 a.m. by Representative Markt Lytle, the Committee's chair. The members of the Committee introduced themselves and the Chair announced the meeting's agenda.

II. Issues Regarding Regional Water and Sewer Districts

The Chair spoke briefly on HB 1248, a bill introduced during the 2000 legislative session related to regional water and sewer districts, and introduced Senator Johnny Nugent. Senator Nugent requested assistance in shaping legislation for next year that would allow more public choice in selecting and purchasing sewer services. He stated that the original intent of the law creating sewer districts was to find a mechanism to provide septic sewer systems in Indiana. He also stated that in certain parts of the state the law has worked well, however, in Jennings County and other areas it has not. Senator Nugent also stated that public participation in creation and operation of the districts is a right.

¹ Exhibits and other materials referenced in these minutes can be inspected and copied in the Legislative Information Center in Room 230 of the State House in Indianapolis, Indiana. Requests for copies may be mailed to the Legislative Information Center, Legislative Services Agency, 200 West Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204-2789. A fee of \$0.15 per page and mailing costs will be charged for copies. These minutes are also available on the Internet at the General Assembly homepage. The URL address of the General Assembly homepage is <http://www.ai.org/legislative/>. No fee is charged for viewing, downloading, or printing minutes from the Internet.

Public Testimony

Chairman Lytle thanked the Indiana Catholic Conference for providing the Committee with a publication entitled, "Care for the Earth" (see Exhibit A). The Chairman then called for public testimony on regional sewer districts (RSDs). Several citizens spoke on this issue (see Exhibits B-E for copies of documents provided by witnesses). Some of the major concerns voiced were:

- Management of the district;
- high hook-on fees and the cost of dismantling current sewers;
- the district's use of bonding instead of the pursuit of grant money;
- inability of citizens to choose whether or not to use the sewer system; and
- the absence of public input on rates.

Representative Lytle then called for a recess. He encouraged audience members to write down their ideas about changing the laws related to sewer districts and return them to the Committee after the break. The Committee recessed at approximately 12.30 p.m.

At approximately 1:00 p.m., the Chair again called the meeting to order. To accommodate members that needed to leave the meeting early, Chairman Lytle temporarily suspended discussion on RSDs in order to discuss other agenda items.

III. Issues Facing Indiana's Tobacco Farmers

Representative Lytle stated that the issues facing Indiana tobacco farmers require further discussion. He invited members of the Committee to create an informal study committee with concerned parties to discuss such issues at a later date.

IV. Internet Service in Rural Committees

The Chair turned the Committee's attention to Representative Friend, who spoke about his experience with obtaining internet service in his community. Representative Friend said that he contacted GTE/ Verizon and the Rochester Telephone Company, and that these companies worked together to provide internet access. Representative Friend stated that this experience proved that industry and communities can work together to provide services to citizens.

Neil Krevda from Verizon Communications then described the cooperation with the Rochester Telephone Company to provide internet service in Representative Friend's area. He also indicated other areas in the state where future partnerships might be possible.

V. Further Discussion of Regional Sewer Districts

The Chair then redirected discussion back to RSDs. He asked Donna Marsh, from People for Choice, to present a tentative list of legislative priorities regarding Regional Sewer Districts (see Exhibit F). Her proposed changes to help Indiana's RSDs laws better serve the public included:

- Provide choice of whether or not to hook onto a sewer;
- protect homeowners whose septic systems function properly;
- exhaust all possibilities of grants and low interest loans prior to bonding;
- maintain local control of RSD boards;
- authorize the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission (IURC) to regulate rates;
- give the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) oversight of construction plans and implementation; and

- clarify laws to allow IDEM to exercise enforcement capabilities.

Senator Jackman then asked Ms. Marsh how she would like RSD governing boards to be elected. She responded that any person in the district should be able to vote for the board. Senator Jackman stated that he was a member of an RSD commission and suggested that county councils should hold the boards more responsible. He also stated that he would not vote to give the IURC authority over the sewer districts.

VI. Adjournment

There being no further business, Chairman Lytle adjourned the meeting at approximately 2:45 p.m.